



Canada – Hong Kong United Heart to Heart

2023 Year-End Report



Summary

With the controversial National Security Law enacted in Hong Kong in mid-2020, many Hong Kong people and Canadians living in Hong Kong plan to leave Hong Kong because they feel uncomfortable with the suppression of democracy and civil liberties. Canada is one of the top countries they like to settle in. To make it easier for Hongkongers to move to Canada, Canada launched the Hong Kong Pathways Program for Hong Kong residents. As a result, many Hongkongers have been moving to Canada since 2021 for work or study purposes. With support from the United Church of Canada, the Canada – Hong Kong United Heart to Heart project was initiated by the Mississauga Chinese United Church. The project aims to assist Hong Kong residents who have moved or are planning to move to Canada in understanding and adapting to life in Canada. Ean Wa Ching Chan has been the project coordinator overseeing this project since January 2023.

In 2023, 1,358 people participated in the various activities organized under this project, and 11 individuals from Hong Kong contacted us to inquire about life in Canada. Most of the project's participants reside in Toronto and Markham.

To help these new Hong Kong immigrants to settle down in Canada, the project provides assistance in three areas: 1. Settle down, 2. Social support, and 3. Create communities.

1. Settle down

New immigrants have limited knowledge about life in Canada, and generally, they do not have many friends or family members to assist and support them. Many also harbor concerns about their new lives in a new country. Therefore, it is crucial to answer their concerns/questions and offer appropriate and practical assistance. This helps them feel they are getting some support to settle in Canada and ease their anxieties as they settle into the new environment.

1.1 Zoom meeting

We connect with our participants who are still in Hong Kong through Zoom meetings. This allows those who are in the process of preparing to come to Canada or contemplating whether to move to Canada to gain a better understanding of life in Canada.

1.2 Social media

We promote this project in our webpage and our Facebook page and address questions within the group. Through our social media, we provide information on procedures for applying for work and study permits and practical information about life in Canada. For those with whom we have established communication, we regularly contact them to understand their current situations and address their needs and concerns.

1.3 Support upon arrival in Canada

For those that need assistance when they landed in Toronto, we offered to pick them up in the airport. As they settle down we try assisting them in resolving their daily challenges, such as moving furniture, relocation, or providing transportation to various places to purchase essential items.

2. Social support

This part primarily aims to help new immigrants to develop interests and connect with other newcomers. Most activities are based at the Toronto Chinese United Church, and we encouraged new Hong Kong immigrants to participate and meet new friends. Transportation is also provided to those participants who require a ride home.

2.1 Soccer (Twice a month with an average of 10 participants)

2.2 Basketball (Twice a month with an average of 12 participants)

2.3 Volleyball (Twice a week with an average of 15 participants)

2.4 Outdoor activities

In spring and summer, a monthly outdoor activity, including hiking, fruit picking, small-town day tours, and cottage trips, were organized to let them experience what Canadians do for leisure.

2.5 Board game event (has been organized 7 times with an average of 12

participants)

2.6 Yoga class (has been organized 10 lessons with an average of 10 participants)

2.7 Outdoor concert

Invited a band of new Hong Kong immigrants to come and perform. This event allowed Hongkongers and those who like Cantonese songs to hear live Cantonese songs. About 100 people attended this outdoor concert in a nice summer evening at the Toronto Chinese United Church parking lot.

2.8 Baking workshop (has been organized once with a total of 7 participants)

2.9 Soap-making workshop (has been organized once with a total of 6 participants)

2.10 Kinball workshop (has been organized once with a total of 9 participants)

2.11 Joint Mid-Autumn activity with the Gallery of Faith (has been organized once with a total of 10 participants)

2.12 Christmas party (has been organized once with a total of 42 participants)

2.13 Home visiting (Visited 3 homes)

3. Creating communities

In addition to participating in activities, new immigrants also need to establish relationships with new friends to accompany them on their settlement journey. Therefore, various communities have been established to allow them to meet regularly, forge friendships, and contribute within the group, fostering a spirit of

mutual assistance in the communities.

3.1 Youth fellowship

There is a gathering every Friday, allowing new immigrants to explore faith, engage in meaningful life-sharing, and participate in serving others. The participants are mostly unmarried young adults. There are two groups of youth fellowship, and each group has about 15 people.

3.2 Create different WhatsApp groups

Football, basketball, and volleyball activities all have their WhatsApp groups. In addition to disseminating information, members can chat within the groups, seek solutions to life difficulties, and organize other activities. They are not just participants; each person can also become a contributor, helping other new immigrants

3.3 Church gatherings

Invite new immigrants met through various activities to participate in church worship services and fellowship, allowing them to integrate into church life and find their community. There are 3 newcomers I met in different activities, attending Sunday services and serving regularly.

Conclusion

While talking and listening to the many new immigrants' concerns in the past year, we learned that their lives in Canada has been challenging. They are facing difficulties both financially and in daily living. Some also experience feelings of loneliness. Our project is helping them to overcome some of their practical and emotional challenges. In General, there is a lack of support for the Cantonese-speaking youth demographic, and the United Church can play a crucial role in filling this gap. Through this project, United Church's communities of faith can open its doors, share its resources to new immigrants, and respond to the needs of these new Hong Kong immigrants. Some newcomers that we have served, who had no connection to any church in Hong Kong are attending church regularly. As we are anticipating more people leaving Hong Kong and coming to Canada in 2024, the Canada Hong Kong Heart to Heart project should continue and seize the opportunity in serving and welcoming more new Hong Kong immigrants and accompany them on their journey in immigrating and settling in Canada. As mentioned, some of these new immigrants are attending and serving in church, we are witnessing their contributions to our community of faith. The grant provided to support this project is receiving its return on investment.